



Virgin Islands Department of Health

FACT SHEET *West Nile Virus*

What Is West Nile Virus?

West Nile virus (WNV) is a potentially serious illness. Experts believe WNV is established as a seasonal epidemic in North America that flares up in the summer and continues into the fall.

What Are the Symptoms of WNV?

Symptoms mirror that of Dengue Fever and include fever, headache, and body aches, nausea, vomiting, and sometimes swollen lymph glands or a skin rash on the chest, stomach and back, and can last for as short as a few days, though even healthy people have become sick for several weeks. Severe symptoms can include high fever, headache, neck stiffness, stupor, disorientation, coma, tremors, convulsions, muscle weakness, vision loss, numbness and paralysis. These symptoms may last several weeks, and neurological effects may be permanent.

What Should I Do if I Think I Have WNV?

Milder WNV illness improves on its own, and people do not necessarily need to seek medical attention for this infection though they may choose to do so. If you develop symptoms of severe WNV illness, such as unusually severe headaches or confusion, seek medical attention immediately. Severe WNV illness usually requires hospitalization. Pregnant women and nursing mothers are encouraged to talk to their doctor if they develop symptoms that could be WNV.

How Does West Nile Virus Spread?

- **Infected Mosquitoes.** Most often, WNV is spread by the bite of an infected mosquito. Mosquitoes become infected when they feed on infected birds. Infected mosquitoes can then spread WNV to humans and other animals when they bite.
- **Transfusions, Transplants, and Mother-to-Child.** In a very small number of cases, WNV also has been spread through blood transfusions, organ transplants, breastfeeding and even during pregnancy from mother to baby.
- **Not through touching.** WNV is not spread through casual contact such as touching or kissing a person with the virus.

How Soon Do Infected People Get Sick?

People typically develop symptoms between 3 and 14 days after they are bitten by the infected mosquito.

How Is WNV Infection Treated?

Like Dengue Fever, there is no specific treatment for WNV infection. In cases with milder symptoms, people experience symptoms such as fever and aches that pass on their own, although even healthy people have become sick for several weeks. In more severe cases, people usually need to go to the hospital where they can receive supportive treatment including intravenous fluids, help with

breathing and nursing care.

What Can I Do to Prevent WNV?

Prevention measures consist of community-based mosquito control programs that are able to reduce vector populations, personal protection measures to reduce the likelihood of being bitten by infected mosquitoes, and the underlying surveillance programs that characterize spatial/temporal patterns in risk that allow health and vector control agencies to target their interventions and resources.

The easiest and best way to avoid WNV is to prevent mosquito bites and to prevent being at-risk, much as you prepare during the Dengue Fever season.

- When you are outdoors, use insect repellent containing DEET. Follow instructions carefully and use on arms, legs, ankles, and nape of neck. Avoid eyes, lips, or bruised skin and avoid applying repellent to children under 2 years of age and to the hands of older children.
- Covering infant cribs with cotton mosquito netting
- Many mosquitoes are most active at dusk and dawn. Be sure to use insect repellent and wear long sleeves and pants at these times or consider staying indoors during these hours.
- Make sure you have good screens on your windows and doors to keep mosquitoes out.
- Get rid of mosquito breeding sites by emptying standing water from flower pots, buckets and barrels. Change the water in pet dishes and replace the water in bird baths weekly. Drill holes in tire swings so water drains out. Keep children's wading pools empty and on their sides when they aren't being used.

Adapted from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

For more information visit www.healthvi.org and click on the CDC (www.cdc.gov) link.